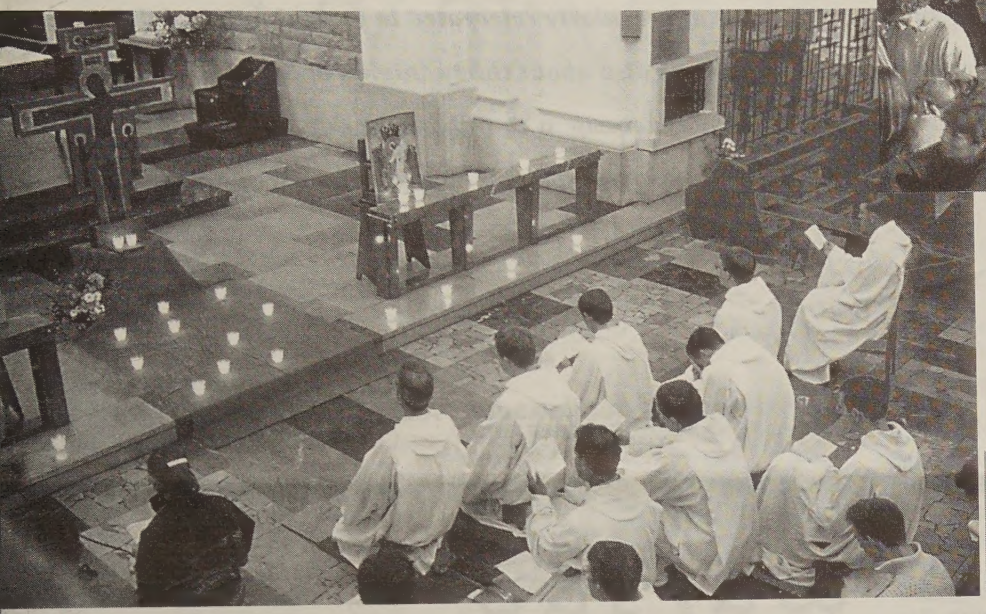
Letter from Taizé

December 1999 – January 2000 Bimonthly 3.50 FF



t the heart of the preparation of the European Meeting is a daily prayer one of the churches in the historic centre of Warsaw.

YOUNG ADULT EUROPEAN MEETING
28 December - 1 January
Taizé 1999/2000
Warsaw

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YOUNG ADULT EUROPEAN MEETING

Beginning the Year 2000 in Warsaw

For tens of thousands of young adults from Europe and other continents, soon the new year will begin in Warsaw, in the joy of sharing and praying together, in the creation of a sign of trust and hope.

During the autumn months, in all the countries of Europe, groups have been formed to meet and pray together. They are preparing themselves to meet others, to live together the inner adventure of a pilgrimage to welcome the gift of God. This jubilee year that is beginning, this celebration of two thousand years of Christ's presence among us, awakens the desire to share what we have received, to learn to recognize how Christ is present in the life of each person, how he has marked the life of different nations.

Special trains will arrive in Warsaw from the four corners of Europe: from Italy, from Hungary, from all the regions of Poland and neighbouring Germany. Groups will also come from faraway Portugal as well as from nearby Ukraine and Russia. Coaches will bring young people from Romania, Croatia, Slovenia, Yugoslavia, Spain, France, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and from many other countries.

Many families in Warsaw will open their doors to the visitors from afar. In parishes, in schools, through Church movements, information about the meeting has spread, especially from person to person. It has also been communicated by radio, newspaper and television. In the end, almost every inhabitant of Poland's capital will have been informed. Many have offered hospitality in their homes or have expressed their willingness to help in the parishes. Some 200 parishes in the city and the surrounding towns are opening their doors. The preparation has not only meant dozens of visits and meetings each day, but also a time of prayer together. Each day, a prayer has been held in a church in the city centre in the early afternoon, and many times of prayer have been held in the evening in the parishes. There is a lot of work too for the practical side of the meeting: setting up the prayer places, organizing transportation and meals...

Many people are aware that this symbolic moment when we enter the year 2000 can be an opportunity to offer a witness that can go far. What are the foundations upon which we want to build the future? At a time when so many people are withdrawing into themselves in fear of the future, young people arriving by the tens of thousands with so much hope can foster joy and openness. As Cardinal Glemp, the archbishop of Warsaw, pointed out in a talk to those who were preparing for the European meeting: "I wish that you may leave behind sadness and complaints in order to build a new century all the more easily. Courage must not desert you. The form the new millenium will take depends on you."

YOUNG GERMANS PREPARE FOR THE MEETING IN WARSAW

"Nights of Light"

In Germany, prayers using the songs of Taizé are regularly celebrated in several hundred different places. During the month of November, there were also about thirty "nights of light" in places like the cathedral of Frankfurt, Saint Nicholas' Church in Leipzig, a church on the outskirts of Berlin, Saint Michael's Church in the heart of Munich. Some young people tell how they prepared and led one of these evening prayers:

- Why a "night of light"?

- To leave everyday life behind us and find peace. To draw renewed hope and courage so as to deal with day-to-day life better. To be the sign of a Church which is welcoming and warm, a sign of communion between the most different people. During this evening, we thought particularly of the young people who, in Europe or elsewhere, are getting ready to go to the meeting in Warsaw.

-How did you invite people?

-There were information sheets, posters and announcements in the local media. But the most important thing was to visit individuals, groups, schools, universities. We did not forget the young people who normally do not go to church. We distributed tapers to people and told them we would light them during the "night of light." We gave out song sheets. We encouraged youth choirs and music teachers to learn the different voices, the musical accompaniments and the solos. Some people who otherwise never would have taken part in a prayer like this came to help us with the music. Young people of Polish background also came.

TAKING TIME TO UNDERSTAND OTHERS

"On the eve of a celebration like New Year's, the people around us think about who they will spend it with, or what exotic destination they will go to. For us, going to Warsaw means accepting to be welcomed by people we do not know, people who may be less well-off materially than we are but who are very open. If young adults from throughout Europe and elsewhere meet with simple means and in peace, that is a sign in the face of a superficial way of life where all that matters is being a consumer. Often it is said that young people no longer want to have anything to do with the Church, that they just live on the surface and refuse to make commitments. And yet the Church and faith are not completely absent from the life of the young; some of us root our lives in these realities. Personally, for me the Church and faith are very important, and that is linked to love and trust, to the way I behave with others. My life is different because I know that in God I find a way out of solitude and that my existence is a gift to be thankful for. I think that many Polish people see things in the same way. I only know about Poland through television, but there are people from Eastern Europe who now live in Germany and I see that they have a different mentality. They live more in their families; they often have better contacts with other persons. Their hospitality is fascinating. The fact that in Warsaw all the participants will stay in families is almost impossible for the inhabitants of a large Germany city to imagine."

"We shouldn't always criticize our German history, but our relationship with Poland is all the same a singular one. Sixty years have passed since the invasion of Poland and the beginning of the Second World War. It is important that many young people from here set out towards Poland in peace. If past generations had had this possibility, probably things would not have happened the way they did. We are the new generation that can change something, that can go towards others without the burden of the past, that can take time to understand others. In this way trust can be built up. The meeting in Warsaw will be for me a time devoted to others. When has an entire generation from the whole of Europe ever had the opportunity to visit one another freely? I want to do that so that bad things do not happen again one day. If we always stay at home, if we are only familiar with our own political situations, it is easy to be manipulated and not really to understand certain developments in neighbouring countries. That is why we really have to set out on pilgrimage."

"I took part in the intensive Bible group this summer in Taizé. I met a girl from Warsaw there. We quickly realized that we had a lot in common. We spoke about the European meeting in Warsaw. She told me about her city, the serious damage done by the Second World War; she explained that only the old centre of the city had been rebuilt as it used to be. When she described some other buildings as 'communist-style boxes,' I thought about Magdeburg, where I live. I spoke to her of my grandmother, who came from the part of Silesia which is now Polish and who had to flee during the war. She told me that her grandparents had to flee from a region that used to be Polish. I realized that our cities and our families had similar destinies, and that many wounds have remained open until today. How beautiful that we could be together now in Taizé! We spoke of the task of the Church in society, and we asked ourselves what the Church could offer today. I thought of our East German Church: it used to be a place of refuge and protest, and now it has become just one institution among many others. It should attract people, offering them the best of what it has, what they are looking for deep in their hearts—a home, a place to be with others and for others. The Church could offer this much more than any other human association."

PRAYER OF 31 DECEMBER 1999

MY TIME IS IN YOUR HAND

This order of worship will be used during the prayer vigils held next December 31st in the parishes of Warsaw. You can use or adapt it for a prayer of departure or, if you are not coming to the European meeting, for a prayer vigil in your parish. The jubilee year invites us to sing Christ's praises and to celebrate the faithfulness of all those who have walked in his footsteps.

SONG By night (De noche iremos)

PRAYER God of all eternity, Saviour of every life, in the footsteps of the holy witnesses to Christ down through the ages, from the apostles and the Virgin Mary to those of today, enable us to dispose ourselves inwardly day by day to place our trust in the Mystery of the Faith.
prayer by Brother Roger

LITANY OF PRAISE for the witnesses to Christ:
Prepare a litany of thanksgiving recalling several persons who were important in enabling Christ to be present to us across the centuries (important for your country, region, community, family...). The names or groups of names can be placed within the following phrase:
God of love, we thank you for..., in them your praise for ever.
An Alleluia can be sung by all after each phrase.

SONG Laudate omnes gentes

PSALM *Verses from Psalm 31, with Alleluia sung between each verse*

In you, O Lord, I take refuge.
Let me never be put to shame.

In your justice, set me free,
hear me and speedily rescue me.

Be a rock of refuge for me,
a mighty stronghold to save me,

for you are my rock, my stronghold.
For your name's sake, lead me and guide me.

Into your hands I commend my spirit.
It is you who will redeem me, Lord.

As for me, I trust in you, Lord;
I say: You are my God: my time is in your hands!

Let your face shine on your servant.
Save me in your love.

READING from the Gospel according to Matthew:
When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."
Matthew 5,1-9

SONG In manus tuas

SILENCE

INTERCESSIONS *with Kyrie eleison*

O Christ, born of the Father before all ages, you took upon yourself our humanity and you rose for us: we worship you.

Son of God, Source of life, we invoke your goodness upon us and upon the entire human family.

Allow us to live by your life and walk as children of light in the joy of Easter.

Increase the faith of your Church; may it faithfully bear witness to your resurrection.

Comfort all who are burdened, and engrave in their hearts your words of eternal life.

Strengthen those who are weak in faith, and reveal yourself to doubting hearts.

Give strength to the sick, support the elderly and reassure the dying by your saving presence.

Prepare in advance a few short intercessions that express our hope in concrete situations close at hand or far away.

OUR FATHER

SONG Jesus, your light (Jésus, le Christ)

PRAYER Christ Jesus, by the presence of your Holy Spirit a question arises: do you recognize the way of life that lies open before you? Listening to such a call, we would like to remain in total trust in you, Christ, so that we can discover how you look at our lives with compassion.
prayer by Brother Roger

SONGS Bless the Lord
Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax
Magnificat

Why do we call churches "God's house"?

God does not need a house to live in. Churches are called "God's house" for us. In the human heart, there is a worry: Where do I come from? Where am I going? What lies in wait for me? "Cast into existence," we sometimes feel like "aliens and strangers on earth" (1 Chronicles 29,15). There are "houses of God" so that God can welcome us into his home. Praying means being invited by God; it means letting Christ welcome us. The Gospels tell us how happy Jesus was when people came and spent time with him. He spoke to them, listened to them, healed them. Churches exist so that we do not forget that Christ welcomes us today, too.

In the Psalms, "God's house" is the Temple in Jerusalem. The faithful never tire of saying how much they love it. "One thing I ask of the Lord—to live in the Lord's house all the days of my life" (Psalm 27,4). "How lovely is your dwelling place. (...) Happy are those who dwell in your house" (Psalm 84,1.4). Psalm 23 shows how the pilgrimages to go there became a symbol of the human journey. And arriving at the Temple for celebrations there meant that life does not lead towards nothingness. At the end of the road, God welcomes us into his house. We do not know exactly how this took place. There were certainly prayers, songs and meals; priests spoke comforting words. In any event, the faithful had a very concrete experience of being welcomed by God. "You prepare a table before me. (...) You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows" (Psalm 23,5). In the Temple people realized that God's presence would never be lacking, even at the hour of death. "My heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor let your faithful one know decay" (Psalm 16,9-10).

Christ built a sanctuary "not made with human hands" (Mark 14,58 and John 2,19-21). Henceforth, "we are God's house" (Hebrews 3,6). Since the Holy Spirit dwells within us, we can pray anywhere. "Where two or three are together in my name," said Jesus, "I am in their midst" (Matthew 18,20). And yet, Christians have not stopped building "houses of God," churches. We still need concrete signs. Entering a church helps us to realize that Christ is constantly waiting for us. Praying means returning home, coming back to the Father's house.

Why belong to the Church if God gives his love to everybody?

What use is it to belong to the Church, since God does not show partiality and "causes his sun to rise on the evil as well as the good" (Matthew 5,45)? In recent times, people have been emphasizing the fact that it is not the Church but the world that God has reconciled to himself (2 Corinthians 5,19). God is "the Saviour of all people" (1 Timothy 4,10). So the question becomes even more crucial: why not just believe in God's unlimited love, why become a part of the communion of the Church?

The life of the Church keeps us from turning God's love into a vague and uncertain concept. The announcement of the Gospel in churches and the sacrament of baptism make God's welcome and forgiveness a certainty. In the celebration of the Eucharist, Christ's presence becomes concrete through elements accessible to the senses. God's love becomes tangible in the kindness, mutual concern and solidarity among believers, for these realities contain God: "If we love one another, God remains in us; in us God's love comes to fulfilment" (1 John 4,12). If I belong to the Church, I do not need to try and convince myself that God loves me. Others tell me that and allow me to feel it.

But cannot we have essentially the same experience outside of the Church? Love and mutual attentiveness exist in other groups and associations. Joining them can give the same feeling of being accepted and taken seriously. And sometimes it is even more difficult to find a generous welcome in the Church than in other organizations. Why then should we make the effort?

What is irreplaceable about the Church is that through it a project is brought to realization that includes all of history and the entire universe (Ephesians 3,10-11). The goal of this project, which the Bible sometimes calls a "covenant," is communion between God and creation as well as communion among all human beings. The members of any group can experience that it is good to be together and to belong to the same community. But the Church enables us to take part in a reality as wide as the world. This choice to serve God's plan by belonging to the Church can require us to give up other things. But are these things so essential when, through this choice, a hope for the entire human family is entrusted to us?

JANUARY

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

1 Sat Lk 2,16-21
When they had seen the baby Jesus in the manger, the shepherds made known what they had been told concerning him and everyone who heard was astonished. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

2 SUN Jn 1,9-12
The Word was the true light that gives light to everyone. To all those who accepted him he gave the right to become children of God.

3 Mon Jr 14,8-9
You are our hope, O God. You are among us and we are called by your name.

4 Tue 1 Jn 5,14-15
John writes: We are confident that if we ask God for anything, and it is in accordance with his will, he will hear us.

5 Wed Rm 10,11-13
Paul writes: There is no difference between persons: all have the same Lord, who generously blesses all who call on him.

6 Thu Mt 2,1-12
EPIPHANY
When they saw the star, the wise men were filled with a great joy. As they entered, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they knelt down and worshipped him.

7 Fri Is 45,3-7
The Lord says: Though you did not know me, I have called you by your name.

8 Sat 1 S 12,20-24
Adore only God; serve the Lord faithfully with all your heart, bear in mind the great things God has done.

9 SUN Mk 1,6-11
At Jesus' baptism, a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; my joy is in you."

10 Mon Ps 145
All look to you in hope, O God. And with generous hand, you satisfy every living creature.

11 Tue Ex 3,1-15
Moses said to God, "If I tell the people: 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am; thus you shall say to them, '"I am" has sent me to you.'"

12 Wed Hab 2,1-4
I shall stay awake, watching to see what God will say to me. And the Lord answered me and said, "The just will live by their faithfulness."

13 Thu Lk 4,1-13
Jesus answered the tempter saying, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

14 Fri Jn 10,22-30
Jesus said: My sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

15 Sat Is 43,1-4a
Thus says God who created you: Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name, you are mine.

16 SUN Jn 1,35-42
Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, heard what John had said and followed Jesus. He found his brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).

17 Mon Ps 138
I thank you, God, for your love and your faithfulness; you have given new strength to my heart.

18 Tue Ezk 34,1-16
The Lord says: I will take care of my flock. I shall look for the lost sheep, bring back the strays, bandage the injured and strengthen the sick. I shall watch over the one that is healthy and strong.

19 Wed Jn 14,15-26
Before his Passion, Jesus said to his disciples: I shall ask the Father and he will give you another protector, the Holy Spirit, to be with you for ever.

20 Thu 1 S 3,1-18
Eli told the child Samuel: If you are called again, say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

21 Fri Jn 6,37-40
Jesus said: The will of the one who sent me is that I should lose none of those he has given me, but that I should raise them up on the last day.

22 Sat 1 K 19,8b-13a
Elijah waited for God on Mount Sinai. A great wind arose, but God was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. Then came a fire, but God was not in the fire. After the fire came a voice of silence, and God spoke to Elijah.

23 SUN Mk 1,14-20
Jesus said to his first disciples, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of people." And at once they left their nets and followed him.

24 Mon Lk 6,27-35
Jesus said: Treat others as you would like them to treat you.

25 Tue Rm 8,1-11
The One who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you.

26 Wed Dt 32,8-11
God finds his people in the desert, in a barren wasteland. God shields them and cares for them, guarding them as the apple of his eye.

27 Thu Ps 62
Trust in God at all times. Pour out your heart to God.

28 Fri Mt 12,46-50
Jesus said: Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

29 Sat Ps 119,1-16
With all my heart I seek you, O God. I treasure your promises in my heart so as not to sin against you.

30 SUN Mk 1,21-28
Jesus taught in the synagogue. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority.

31 Mon Ga 5,13-14
You were called to be free. Do not use your freedom for self-indulgence but to serve one another in love.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

FEBRUARY

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

1 Co 15,12-28
1 Tue Paul writes: If Christ has not been raised then our message is empty and so is your faith. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. For just as all die in Adam, so in Christ all will be brought to life.

Jn 12,35-36
2 Wed PRESENTATION OF THE LORD Jesus said to his disciples: Believe in the light so that you may become children of light.

Ps 34
3 Thu The Lord is near to the broken-hearted. He saves those whose spirit is crushed.

Ps 4
4 Fri Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. You have set me free from my distress.

Is 40,1-5
5 Sat Console my people, says your God, console them and speak to their hearts.

Mk 1,29-39
6 SUN Very early, long before dawn, Jesus got up and went to a deserted place and there he prayed. When the disciples found him, he said to them, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also."

Lk 9,57-62
7 Mon Someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

2 Tm 4,6-8.16-18
8 Tue Paul writes: The Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the good news might be proclaimed for all people to hear.

Heb 2,5-18
9 Wed Because Christ himself suffered when he was put to the test, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Is 26,7-9
10 Thu My soul longs for you in the night, Lord, and deep within me, my spirit seeks you.

Mk 2,15-17
11 Fri Jesus said: It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Rm 12,14-18.21
12 Sat Do not repay evil with evil. Seek to do what is regarded as good by all. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Mk 1,40-45
13 SUN A leper came to Jesus and said, "If you are willing, you can cleanse me." Filled with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing. Be clean!"

Mk 2,13-14
14 Mon As he was walking along, Jesus saw Levi sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

Is 40,29-31
15 Tue Those who hope in God shall renew their strength. They shall run and not grow weary, they shall walk and not be tired.

Mt 12,1-8
16 Wed Jesus said: It is mercy that pleases me, not sacrifice.

Lk 10,1-9
17 Thu Jesus said: The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. So pray that the Lord of the harvest may send out workers into his harvest.

Is 42,1-4
18 Fri The Lord says: My servant does not cry out or raise his voice. Faithfully he will present what is just; he will not falter or be discouraged until he has established justice on the earth.

Ph 2,1-11
19 Sat St. Paul writes: Be of the same mind, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing from selfish ambition. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus himself.

Mk 2,1-12
20 SUN Four people came, bringing a paralysed man, and they lowered the mat on which he lay in front of Jesus. Jesus, when he saw their faith, said to the paralytic, "My child, your sins are forgiven."

Is 41,8-10
21 Mon The Lord says to his people: You are my servant, I have chosen you and will not cast you off. Fear not, for I am with you.

Mt 16,13-20
22 Tue Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do people say I am?" "Some say John the Baptist," they answered, "some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But you," he said, "who do you say I am?" Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Ep 2,13-18
23 Wed Christ is our peace. He has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between the peoples and reconciled them to God, through the cross.

1 Co 4,1-5
24 Thu Paul writes: Judge nothing prematurely, but wait until the Lord comes.

2 Co 4,5-7
25 Fri We do not proclaim ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord. We are your servants for Jesus' sake.

Jn 21,15-17
26 Sat Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you."

2 Co 3,1-6
27 SUN Paul writes to the Corinthians: You are a letter from Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Lk 10,38-42
28 Mon Jesus said to Martha: You are worried and upset about many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one.

Ph 1,1-11
29 Tue Paul writes: I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best.

JOHANNINE HOURS

JANUARY : JOHN 1,1-12

To introduce his gospel, Saint John confronts us right from the start with the mystery of Christ, presenting him as he will reveal himself in fullness after his resurrection. Jesus manifests himself as the light of the world. Light is something that on the one hand is most powerful (we can think of those rays of light that take billions of years to reach us) but at the same time most fragile, because to block the light all we have to do is to put our hand in front of our eyes. Light and darkness can coexist with no problem. Light cannot force darkness, but all it takes is the smallest opening for light to be diffused throughout a room.

This light gives life. Not only does it provide warmth and enable us to find our way, but it situates us in the midst of creation and allows us to discover who God is. Welcoming it means entering the reality of God's life and love which, in the resurrection, will show themselves to be stronger than hatred and refusal. Welcoming it also means changing our outlook—no longer wishing to be our own light, no longer wishing to transform resistances and blind spots by our own powers, but letting in the light that gives new life to what seemed to have become hard.

We should not be afraid of this call which seems so demanding—to be a witness to the light, as John the Baptist was, to be ourselves the light of the world, as Jesus invites us to be (Matt 5,14). It is not our strength that matters for this, but rather letting a reflection of God's love shine through us and radiate outward in the midst of those who were unaware of it.

- What gospel text helps me understand that Christ is light?
- When I am frightened by darkness, what helps me to realize that Christ's light is near?

FEBRUARY : LUKE 14,15-24

How many times was Jesus confronted with the questions: What is God's Kingdom like? How can we enter it? Expectations were so different: will this Kingdom come with power or is it always put off till later, like a longed-for promise?

"One of those at table said to Jesus..." Here again we are at a meal, as so often in Saint Luke's gospel. Jesus is the one who eats with us. How can people be closer than to be seated at the same table? And so Jesus will use this very image to explain how God waits for us and invites us.

In the gospel according to Saint Matthew, the meal is a wedding banquet for the son of a king. How is it possible that the invited guests could forget the date? They are invited twice; how can they accord priority to their own business, even if it is important, when this meal represents the most essential event for the future of the Kingdom? It is the poor, the lame, the blind who are able to accept the invitation and enter into God's joy, because they cannot take care of their own business: they are dependent on others for everything. Jesus is close to death, and so perhaps feels even closer to all who are abandoned and forgotten. He understands that, through his resurrection, all humanity will be able to welcome God's love.

In the face of incomprehensible forgetfulness, and even at times refusal, Jesus reveals the image of the Father's generosity. All people are invited to this communion and it is through this incredible gift that the Kingdom is revealed.

- How can we recognize those times when God's Kingdom becomes manifest, when a communion becomes possible with Christ and with others?
- The festive meal is offered without conditions. How can we remain open and enter day after day into the joy offered to us?

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Church Rebuilding Itself

CAMBODIA

Relations between the Christians of Cambodia and the Taizé Community go back a long time. In 1997, two young people spent a week in Taizé with the parish priest of Phnom Penh. They discovered a way of praying that was brand-new for them, with times of silence and songs that were both simple and beautiful. Their stay had been preceded by visits of a Taizé brother to Cambodia, invited by the bishop of Phnom Penh.

For Ratana, that short stay in Taizé was a unique experience. The way of praying, singing together and remaining in silence in God's presence opened new horizons for him. When they returned to Cambodia, Ratana, Bou Nara and Father Werechai asked themselves how they would share with others what they had discovered together. They translated some of the songs into Khmer, then they prepared times of prayer using the songs. Now over thirty songs have been translated and meditative prayers are being held in many places. It is often these songs that those receiving instruction for baptism learn first. When he speaks about the prayer, Ratana mentions several aspects that are important for him. First of all, the songs are calm and meditative and help us turn our hearts toward God. The choice of short and accessible Bible texts allows us better to assimilate the message they address to us. Meditating on these simple passages is particularly profitable for new Christians or for those preparing for baptism. Ratana also sees preparing the place of prayer as very important, so that everything may be concretely oriented towards the cross, the passion, towards Christ.

Now Taizé welcomes two young Cambodians each year for a stay of several months. This year, it was Mam Roth Mouny, a young married man from Phnom Penh from a Christian background, and Sam Anita, a young woman working as a secretary. For her, it was only when someone explained to her the meaning of the cross she was wearing around her neck that she began to search for the meaning of the Church and the faith. Both were deeply impressed by the prayer and the silence, but they were also struck by the depth of the meetings with other young people during their stay. Mouny was moved by the mutual trust, lived so simply day after day, in the midst of so many people and such diversity. For Anita too, the absence of barriers between people was striking, and it is that openness and the meaning of contact with others that she wants to share, now that she is back in Phnom Penh. Welcoming newcomers to the Church, she tries to create bonds that go beyond the liturgy.

This year, during the annual visit of a Taizé brother to Cambodia, the songs were sung for the first time with Christians of different denominations, especially during a meeting open to all, at Kompong Cham. For the first time too, Brother Roger's letter "1999-2001" was translated into Khmer. Pracot You, who undertook that translation, said, "As I worked on it, I realized that these ideas were very simple and yet profound. We are already familiar with these things, but this letter enables us to reflect on them in a deeper way." She is very committed in the life of the Church in Cambodia, and she sees how the meditative singing has enabled the young to find an new approach to prayer and inner life.

For the Church in Cambodia, which suffered so much during the Khmer Rouge pe-

riod, when countless Christians and all the priests were killed, a message of peace, reconciliation and hope is truly a bearer of deep meaning. This Church has lived Christ's passion in its own flesh, and today it is in full "resurrection." It is rebuilding itself. And many people around the world, by their prayer, can accompany and support this rebuilding.

A Culture of Relationship

TANZANIA

Bernard Joinet was a missionary priest in Tanzania for thirty-three years. Tanzania is an African country close to the equator, on the Indian Ocean. During his stay in Taizé, he shared with different groups his experience and his hopes:

When I arrived in Tanzania, I met the president of the bishops' conference and I said to him, "You probably don't need me; you have lots of priests." "That's true," he replied. "This year I ordained ten priests in my diocese. I don't need more priests but through you I have a window on the world. If we remain only among ourselves we become prisoners of our culture, of our small local questions. To be Christians, we need to be open to the whole world."

I was chaplain to the faculty of medicine for twenty years. In the morning I taught and I received psychiatric patients. In the evening, when the students had finished their studies, I was the chaplain. Part of my work was to help those infected by the AIDS virus. In the hospital, one patient out of every two dies of AIDS. At first people thought that AIDS was a tiny stream that could be dammed up. But now we realize that it is a flood that keeps on rising.

What have I received from Tanzania? I learnt that what matters most is to have as many good relationships as possible with as many people as possible. It is a culture centred on relationship, whereas in Europe the accent is on efficiency and profit. That means in the first place taking the time to live. For example, in Europe you are asked straight off, "Do you have a light?" In Tanzania someone would say, "Hello, how are you, sir? How are your children? Ah, they are in school now! And your wife, how is she doing? May I have a light?"

In Tanzania, lots of time and money are devoted to celebrations. These imply a certain solidarity. The whole clan and network of friends comes together. That is a way of showing others that you have friends and relatives. From an economic point of view, one could think that spending so much is absurd. But from the viewpoint of human relationships, it's very important. A celebration is a marvellous social value, all the more because everyone contributes something. All these celebrations, whether for a wedding, a confirmation, a baptism or a funeral, reinforce human relations. Naturally this leads to problems too: if you spend a lot of money for a big celebration, you do not save, invest, or develop your resources. That is why it is so difficult for a culture centred on relationships to enter into the world economy and to be competitive.

Something else that strikes me is the solidarity. People from the same family help one another. For example, at the hospital where I worked, visits are allowed from noon to 2pm and from 4 to 6pm. At noon and at 4pm, there are thousands of people in front of the doors of the hospital. When the doors open, a flood of persons enters. It is a flood of love. They had to take two buses, and walk for an hour and a half, with food in plastic containers and thermoses, to come and take care of their sick relatives. Almost all the patients are well taken care of. Three or four persons come to see them each day.

Solidarity is the only way to survive. When you have no social security, no life insurance, no medical insurance, no money, what is left? Simply the solidarity of your group. You cannot break with your group because if there is a problem, that is the only way you can survive. When you are cut off from your clan, it's very difficult to live. When you have good relations the clan is there, the family stands around you. Solidarity is thus a question of cultural education, but it is also an imperative economic reality.

I think that economic progress is slow in Africa because it is true to its culture. It is clear that if profit and efficiency are emphasized as in Europe, there is not enough time for human relationships. Everyone focuses on their own problems. When you walk somewhere, you have litt time to greet others. The Africans I kno respect their culture. They are not ready t sacrifice their culture to the notion of i dividual profit. So even if they believe economic progress, who could criticize culture, criticize the way a member of t family is buried or the way family membe help each other out?

In Ireland groups are being organized to prepare for the Young Adult European Meeting in Warsaw.

For information and registration, contact :
Stephanie Kiely
19 Cherbury Park Road
Lucan, Co. Dublin.
086-8505060

The total cost of the meeting will be in the region of £250 or less, depending on the number travelling. Flights and Bus must be booked early, as it is the Millennium Year.

TWO MEETINGS IN CANADA :

TORONTO (4-5 February 2000)
For more information contact Janet Loo,
at janet.loo@utoronto.ca
or call the Chaplaincy department
at 416-926-1300 ext. 3439 or 7278.

VICTORIA, B.C., 18-20 February.
For more information, contact :
Katryn or Marianne Lacerte,
#11 - 853 Burdett Ave. tel: 001-250-384-9699
Victoria, B.C. V8W 1B3
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- In certain countries it is possible to pay **within the country**:

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